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Review of *Drinking and Sobriety among the Lakota Sioux*. By Beatrice Medicine.

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Drinking and Sobriety among the Lakota Sioux. By Beatrice Medicine. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007. vi + 155 pp. References, index. \$76.00 cloth, \$27.95 paper.

Depicting alcohol use among Lakotas as both complex and culturally-specific, Beatrice Medicine's book is an important addition to Native American and Great Plains studies. Medicine emphasizes that to comprehend its social, psychological, and economic dimensions fully, one must understand Lakota customs and two hundred years of history.

Alcohol was introduced among the Plains people in the early 1800s and traded for buffalo robes and jerky. Though alcohol was prohibited on reservations until 1953, smuggling and bootlegging were rampant, and the ban gave rise to a binge-drinking style among Lakotas since individuals had to drink fast or risk being caught. Because Lakotas and white people did not socialize, Medicine argues, there were no other drinking styles to emulate.

To support her claims, she presents studies she conducted on Standing Rock Reservation and convincingly links cultural attitudes to current patterns of alcohol use. Among Lakotas drinking is a social activity, and, because generosity is a strong cultural value, alcohol is shared. With the onset of the reservation system, Lakota men lost their traditional role as providers and turned to alcohol to relieve feelings of powerlessness and to prove their masculinity, deprived as they were of other cultural means. Medicine aptly suggests women are more likely than men to be looked down upon if they drink and to be regarded as neglecting their children. While women are socialized to drink in some families, in others they assume the role of caretakers, helping the alcohol-dependent when ill or in legal trouble.

One of Medicine's most noteworthy observations is that there are no social controls on alcoholism or pressures to maintain sobriety within Lakota society. Acts committed while drunk are excusable, and the *tiyospaye* extended family unit does not shun alcoholics, but supports them with food and shelter in accordance with the cultural weight given to generosity. As she notes, the social pressure to keep drinking can be pervasive in one's peer group, since those who refuse alcohol are accused of considering themselves "too good" to drink with others.

Medicine states that it is the responsibility of the individual to have the will power to stop drinking, which requires introspection and sacrifice similar to the sun dance or vision quest, an endeavor that is very personal in nature. Some have found help for their drinking in the sun

dance ceremony and other rituals such as the sweat lodge and *yuwipi*, but these efforts are limited in the absence of a social code against drinking. Medicine argues that to combat alcohol abuse, there must be significant changes in the way Lakota people socialize, and individuals must be able to earn money with dignity.

This book's primary weakness is its reliance on field data from the 1970s and 80s. Since that time, methamphetamines have become more prominent on Lakota reservations, but ceremonies such as the sun dance have also increased. Further investigation into the helpfulness of ritual in recovering from or preventing addiction is needed. **Teresa Milbrodt**, *Honors Department, Bowling Green State University*.